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ABSTRACT

Workers from the West Indies, India, Pakistan, Cyprus, and Southern Italy have been immigrating with their families to the major industrial cities of Britain in appreciable numbers from the mid 1950s onwards. In order to provide an education in English for the immigrant workers' children enrolled in the local schools, the Schools Council funded a curriculum development project at Leeds University to look specifically at the language needs of non-English-speaking immigrant children, to produce teaching materials, and to promote relevant teacher training. "Scope, Stage 1," an initial course in English for children aged eight to 15, is the first publication (by Books for Schools, Ltd., 1969) to issue from this project. The scheme is organized around a series of themes that relate to the immigrant child and his social and linguistic needs. Structural and phonological features of English are emphasized, techniques for presenting new language points and suggestions for re-presenting, practicing, and consolidating the same language points in a variety of situations in and outside the classroom are provided. The materials are designed to be flexible and to "knit together strands from several disciplines and methodologies to show that every teacher can be a language teacher." (AMM)

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Paper presented by June Derrick at the fourth annual convention of TESOL, San Francisco, March 18-21, 1970.

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An English exercise

From the mid 1950s onwards, immigrant workers from the West Indies, India, Pakistan, Cyprus and Southern Italy have been coming in a continuous stream to work in the major industrial cities of Britain. Their families have joined them, often after a time lag; their children enrol at the local schools, usually as soon as they arrive. (Education in Britain, I should remind you, is compulsory and free from 5 to 15.)

Little attention was paid to the children of immigrants until the early 1960s. Then, as the numbers in some schools rose to considerable proportions, the teachers began to make their voices heard. The main difficulty, as they identified it at that time, lay in trying to provide an education in English for children who spoke little or no English. It seemed pure chance that at that very moment there was a sudden proliferation of courses in linguistics and second-language teaching at British universities. Where there had been one such course hitherto, there were now half a dozen or so, all aiming at producing a new breed of teachers of English as a second language - teachers intended for the rapidly expanding field overseas. India and Africa were calling; the teaching of English as a second language was predominantly an overseas occupation.

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Teachers in British schools, contending with classes that contained anything from 5 to 50 per cent or more of non-English-speakers apparently heard of the mysteries of English as a second language before the then Ministry of Education or the Local Education Authorities. In the West Midlands region and in London they formed their own professional associations; among their number were teachers who had returned from a stint overseas and who could contribute something about the teaching of English as a second language to the pool of knowledge. Suddenly there seemed to be rather a lot of teachers involved in an exercise of self-help; this indicated that there were rather a lot of children needing something new in the way of language teaching. But nobody knew how many. And it was only in 1965, after a research proposal was put up to the recently formed Schools Council by Leeds University, that an attempt was made to discover the size of the immigrant school population. The resultant survey found that there were already more than 130,000 immigrant children in British schools, very many of whom needed special language training, but very few of whom were receiving it. There was a complete absence of any special materials and only the very scantiest provision of in-service teacher training. No one could really be blamed - no one in authority seemed to have had time to think about this whole new issue.

The Schools Council felt that it was time for action, and funded a curriculum development project at Leeds University to look specifically at the language needs of non-English-speaking immigrant children, to produce teaching materials and to promote relevant teacher training. This project has had a busy and full life since 1966, promoting new thought and action in the junior and secondary schools (children aged 8 to 15) and producing materials. Of these one set has so far been published. This is an initial course in English for children aged 8to 13. It was given extensive field trials, re-written and came out under the title Scope, Stage 1 just over a year ago. I shall devote the remainder of this paper to a discussion of Scope, Stage 1, briefly describing more recent work undertaken by the project at Leeds.

Scope, Stage 1 offers a teaching programme or scheme of work to the teacher of non-English-speaking children in Britain and is intended for use in any one of the many types of organization you can find in our schools. A teacher may have a full-time 'special' language class for the whole or part of her day, or she may have a series of groups pulled out of normal 'mixed' classes for periods of special instruction; or she may herself teach the mixed class and instruct the non-English-speaking pupils individually or in groups for short spaces of time in the course of the day. The teachers and linguist who devised Scope, Stage 1 worked on the assumption that whatever the amount of English the immigrant children are exposed to throughout the day, they will not necessarily learn much from this 'bath of language' unless they are helped towards a growing control of the systems that comprise it.

Most teachers in Britain have had little or no opportunity of language study; such as they have had is usually irrelevant for the purposes we are discussing or positively misleading. Materials have therefore to take this into account; they have to be materials that teach teachers about language. They must also, though, take into account what the teacher already does know, that is a large amount about children and how they learn, and also about the types of experiences the ideal curriculum should provide.

Scope, Stage 1 tries to combine these various strands of thinking. It provides a scheme of work in language in which structural and phonological features of English are given considerable prominence. It outlines techniques the teacher can employ to present new language points, many of which relate to fairly 'classical' ESL methodology. Equally important, it indicates how throughout the day and in a variety of situations (in and outside the classroom) the same language points can be re-presented, practised and consolidated while the children enjoy a broad curriculum. In this, maths. and elementary science, creative work, physical activity ('P.E.'), practical work, music and story telling all have their place. Scope tries to show the teacher that language teaching is not something that needs to take place in an insulated ESL slot on the timetable; almost anything that teachers or children choose to do, can, with the exercise of insight and opportunism on the teacher's part, become a language-learning experience.

The scheme is organised round a series of themes that relate to the immigrant child and his social and linguistic needs. These begin with the classroom - pretty well the only place where he positively has to use English when he first arrives - and extend to the street, the urban environment which he has to come to terms with, the park (his play-place), the shops, and so on. The themes move outwards from his basic needs to ones that relate increasingly to the school curriculum. Thus later themes introduce language and concepts of social studies, elementary biology, geography, etc. The language selected for teaching depends largely on the demands of the themes; other criteria operate of course, but relevance and usefulness predominate.

I should add that the scheme also tries to allow for the fact that the perfect situation for language-learning often happens by luck rather than deliberate planning. Neither the teacher nor a curriculum guide can predict that a child will spill his bottle of milk or cut his knee, or bring a pet mouse to school. What we have tried to do is to show that teacher how to make linguistic capital out of such situations and to have techniques up his sleeve that will enable him to do just this. Scope, Stage 1 tries to offer the teacher a way of thought rather than a definite map that he has to follow.

Apparatus that is provided as part of the Scope materials serves various purposes. It includes many components such as pictures, cut-out figures, picture cards and picture books, all intended for use in oral language practice and adaptable to various kinds of class organization. It also includes pre-reading apparatus which leads up to the Scope elementary reading scheme.

Classroom trials of Scope, Stage 1 helped the project team to revise the language scheme and the material components, and subsequent experience shows that it is being used with considerable flexibility and freedom by teachers in Britain. For some it serves as a bible, for others - the majority - as a taking-off point.

For older learners, those who come to British schools in their teens, we are at present working on a more restricted set of materials. For younger pupils, those in our infant schools (5 to 7-year-olds) we are embarking on a fresh approach. Scope, Stage 1 has something to offer to the teacher of young children, but not enough. Apart from developmental questions which it dodges, it does not reflect the even freer, more child-centred activity-based education we aim to offer children at this age. We hope the recently recruited infant section of the project will produce something that, like Scope, Stage 1, helps to show the infant teacher the 'language-learning potential' of the typical situations she finds or provides or engineers in the infant room. These will include sand play, creative play, and play in 'the Wendy house' (as we call it), as much as situations in which each child works or plays and - above all - talks as an individual. We hope that teachers and para-professionals in the infant classroom will retain their and their pupils' freedom while at the same time seeing that certain objectives are attained.

One of the lessons we have learnt during this recent development work in English as a second language for immigrant children in Britain has been the need to promote and sustain co-operation between the specialist language teacher and the non-specialist teacher. One of the most significant feature of the Scope materials is the way they try to knit together strands from several disciplines and methodologies to show that every teacher can be a language teacher.

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